

H18.---

WASHINGTON POST

9 February 1987

Ex-Official Says Ethiopia Mired In 'No-Win' War

*U.S. Advised to Avoid Conflict,
Focus on Protesting Repression*

By Joanne Omang
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Marxist government of Ethiopia is in "a no-win relationship" with rebels trying to overthrow it and the United States should stay clear of the conflict, according to a former Ethiopian foreign minister who fled into exile last year.

Goshu Wolde, 45, in his first public statements since resigning last October, said U.S. policy should instead be one of vigorous protest against human-rights violations and the increasing repression of dissent by Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, who took power in a military coup in 1974.

Goshu, who now lives in Philadelphia, told Washington Post editors and reporters last week that any foreign intervention sparks a surge of nationalism that unites quarreling Ethiopians. This has already forced Soviet advisers to maintain a low profile in Ethiopia and has prevented the Soviet Union from asking Ethiopia to contribute troops for duty in Angola or Mozambique, Goshu said.

Economic sanctions would only hurt desperately poor Ethiopian civilians, so the only acceptable U.S. course is to await "a spontaneous corrective revolution" against Mengistu by the Ethiopian people, Goshu said. He said there is some resentment within the Ethiopian armed forces against the Soviet presence, and eventually they could join a rebellion.

The Central Intelligence Agency was reported last spring by sources close to the issue to have been providing about \$500,000 a year for propaganda efforts by Ethiopian dissidents based in London. Reagan administration praise of Ethiopian "freedom fighters" in the northern Eritrea and Tigray provinces peaked last summer, when officials told one Ethiopian exile leader his cause would receive attention after aid to the Nicaraguan contras had been secured. That aid was approved last October.

A senior administration official this week agreed with Goshu that there is no sign of a military victory by either side. "The situation can only be solved by negotiation, [but] the government refuses," he said.

Ethiopia continues to be on the administration's list of Soviet-dominated nations where resistance forces receive at least rhetorical support from the United

States. No U.S. military or economic aid flows to the government, and last year's \$7.4 million in food aid—a sharp reduction from the levels of grants during the famine two years ago—is scheduled to be halved under 1988 budget requests.

Goshu, who attended Yale Law School and was regarded as one of Ethiopia's most capable officials, said that the dozens of other Ethiopian public figures who have fled their country in the last two years are a quarrelsome and dispirited group who have yet to agree on policy, much less on a leader.

"My contribution is to speak my mind," Goshu said. "I don't think any of the [exile] groups has any strength at the moment."

Armed rebel groups have been unable to cause serious damage to Mengistu's Army, which in turn has been unable to eradicate the uprisings, Goshu said. "A military solution is not attainable," he said. "It is a no-win relationship."

In fact, the rebels serve chiefly to force Mengistu to seek Soviet military aid and accept a Soviet political line that he otherwise might resist, Goshu said.

Goshu, describing himself as a social democrat, said he continues to support the public-service goals of the 1974 revolution, and praised Mengistu for having raised the population's political consciousness, ending "feudal production relationships" and taking organizational steps toward democracy.

However, Mengistu "wanted to make a public relations exercise" out of a new constitution, which names him to so many jobs as to give him exclusive power, Goshu said.

"The national assembly is only a rubber stamp . . . even party officials cannot speak their minds now," he said. "This offended my core values . . . I could not continue as a partner in such a melodrama."